

“Scientific research is integral to our foreign policy challenges and economic development”

Interview with Nina Fite, head of the Environment, Science and Technology Office at the U.S. Embassy, Budapest

One of the keys to Hungary's economic development is its highly educated and innovative workforce, Nina Fite, head of the Environment, Science and Technology Office of the United States Embassy in Budapest told Business Hungary in an interview on the past, present and future of US-Hungarian scientific cooperation. In the future, the emphasis should be placed on more agency-to-agency cooperation and partnerships among scientists between the two countries, she emphasized.

BH *What are the main areas and what is the framework of the scientific and technical cooperation between the U.S. and Hungary?*

Scientific cooperation between our two countries has touched on almost all fields. The major areas are basic sciences, environment, agriculture, biomedical research, engineering research, energy and natural resources. As for the framework, in 2000 a new U.S.-Hungarian scientific and technical agreement was signed as an extension of the so-called Joint Fund activities (see box). The new agreement continues the same principles as the previous one, signed in 1989, providing for fruitful exchange between Hungarian and American top scientists and researchers. Scientific cooperation has been and continues to be beneficial not only for the Hungarian researchers and their counterparts, but also to U.S. research from the input of Hungarian scientists in collaborative efforts.

BH *Past roots?*

The Hungarian Academy of Science and the American Philosophical Society founded by Benjamin Franklin can trace their relationship back to 1832 when Hungarian academician Károly Nagy sent a letter to Philadelphia requesting the establishment of a reciprocal relationship. The U.S. promptly agreed. Since that day, generations of Hungarian scientists, technologists as well as scholars have been making individual contributions to American science and development. Throughout the last two centuries, Hungarian scientists have had a profound influence on research and development in the U.S., from János Xantus who made significant



contributions to ethnography, zoology and geography by discovery of 89 islands and shoals between America and Australia, to the scientists associated with the Manhattan project and the development of the hydrogen bomb.

BH *How do you see the future role of scientific research?*

As Secretary of State Colin Powell recently highlighted in a speech to the American Institute of Physics, scientific research is integral to our foreign policy challenges and economic development. At the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the United States will stress that good governance, including solid science and technology policies are fundamental to sustainable development. For example, we will showcase Geographic Information for Sustainable Development Project which makes satellite imagery available to people around the world via laptops. This project will be available to policy makers and to scien-

The Joint Fund

► **The primary aim of the U.S.-Hungarian** Joint Fund was to execute the intergovernmental agreement between Hungary and the U.S. on scientific and technological cooperation, signed on October 4, 1989 after the historical visit to Hungary by President George Bush. The Joint Fund was created to encourage and support a wide range of cooperative Science & Technology (S&T) activities, including research projects, workshops, conferences, project development visits and other means of collaborative work.

The Joint Fund for research took the form of grants to Hungarian and U.S. researchers via their institutions. The Joint Fund was not a unilateral aid program from the U.S., but a joint management of matched annual equal contributions – USD 1 million per year – paid by Hungary and the U.S. to the Fund. The main scientific areas supported were: sciences, environmental protection, medical sciences and health, agriculture, engineering research, energy and natural resources.

The Joint Fund was governed by the U.S.-Hungarian S&T Joint Board consisting of two representatives, one from each of the two executive agencies – the U.S. Department of State and the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Joint Board – based on reviews of the U.S. and Hungarian technical agencies – approved (or declined) funding requests. The Joint Fund began financing projects in 1990 until funding expired in 2002. More than 250 bilateral research projects as well as 200 travel requests and 80 workshops were supported, and more than USD 5 million an equivalent amount in Hungarian forints were distributed among top Hungarian and U.S. researchers.